

A SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ROUTING TELEPHONE CALLS OVER A VOICE AND DATA NETWORK

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) from provisional application number is 60/484,385 filed July 2, 2003, and application no. 10/354,527 filed January 30, 2003, both of which applications are incorporated by reference herein, in their entirety, for all purposes.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to routing of telephone calls. More particularly, the present invention relates to the routing of telephone calls initiated on a wired or wireless telecommunication network to a voice and data network (VDN).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] It is known in the art to place telephone calls around the world using conventional public switched telephone network systems. **Figure 1** illustrates a simplified diagram of how a call, such as a long distance call is handled. A caller first uses a telephone **100** and makes a call that is routed through a public switched telephone network (PSTN) **110** to another phone anywhere in the world **115**. Similarly, as shown in **Figure 2**, a mobile phone user uses a mobile phone **200** to make a call that is first routed to a mobile phone network **205** and then to a PSTN **210** where it can then be routed to a telecommunications device **215** located any place around the world, such as a telephone in located in a distant country **220**.

[0004] Operators of PSTNs charge callers for the routing of phone calls. Though the exact amounts of the charges vary depending on market circumstances, it is almost universally true that the further away the call is going (i.e. long distance calls), the greater the cost to the user. This is particularly true when calls cross political boundaries, such as borders between countries, as well as physical boundaries, such as oceans.

[0005] Vendors currently offer products that provide permit telecommunications to be carried via a VDN such as the Internet. For example, Vonage is a company that uses the Cisco ATA. Features that allow mobile telephone usage over the Internet cannot offer this calling activity with this unit. The Cisco ATA unit is broadband only and does not provide a means to attach to the phone jack in the wall. Without attachment to the wall the Vonage-Cisco unit cannot detect incoming PSTN calls. Without the ability to detect incoming PSTN calls the Vonage-Cisco unit cannot then bridge PSTN callers into the Vonage voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) network.

[0006] Packet 8 sells an Internet access device (IAD) (DAT310) that is broadband only. The DTA310 provides a single RJ-11 connection for an analog phone. The DTA310 does not provide a means to attach the unit to the phone jack in the wall. Without attachment to the wall the Packet 8 unit cannot detect incoming PSTN calls; without the ability to detect incoming PSTN calls the Packet 8 unit cannot then bridge PSTN callers into the Packet 8 VoIP network.

[0007] Net2Phone sells a line of IAD units supporting both broadband and narrowband dialup. One unit provides a 2-port gateway includes means to connect directly to a phone jack in the wall. It is unknown if the hardware architecture of the Net2Phone unit supports the ability to bridge a mobile caller into their VoIP network. However, firmware does not appear to be available for the current IAD units to make VoIP calling from non-VoIP telephones a reality.

[0008] What would be useful are a system and method for routing calls originating from the PSTN and mobile telephone networks to VDN thereby permitting telephone users to take advantage of the Internet as a telecommunication network for the placing of long distance telephone calls.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] An embodiment of the present invention utilizes a telecommunications gateway (TCG) configured to receive communications from a remote location via a communications device (either from via a PSTN or a wireless network operated by a

mobile service provider). The TCG initiates a call from the gateway to a remote communication device over a VDN. In another embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet and the remote communication device is a telephone (either wired or mobile), but the present invention is not so limited. The TCG functions as a bridge between the incoming calling device and the remote communication device. In another embodiment of the present invention, the functions of the TCG are performed by equipment operated by the operator of a PSTN.

[0010] In this application the term "mobile" is used to denote cellular telephone users, mobile telephone users and ultimately other users of mobile devices that might require access to long distance services in order to send or receive data. Thus while this application discusses the routing of mobile telephone calls, those skilled in the art will understand that this technology and method apply equally to other mobile devices as well.

[0011] It is therefore an aspect of the present invention to permit users to make long distance calls using the Internet as the communication network of choice.

[0012] It is a further aspect of the present invention to permit mobile telephone users to take advantage of the Internet as a telecommunication network for the placing of long distance telephone calls.

[0013] It is yet another aspect of the present invention to support "Anywhere – Anytime" VoIP access.

[0014] It is another aspect of the present invention to provide access to VoIP calling without regard to the technology used by the calling party or the receiving party.

[0015] It is yet another aspect of the present invention to support all mobile providers worldwide, regardless of their format (e.g., CDMA, TDMA, GSM) and protocols used.

[0016] These and other aspects of the present invention will become apparent from a review of the general and detailed descriptions that follow.

[0017] An embodiment of the present invention utilizes a telecommunications gateway

(TCG) configured to receive communications from a remote location via a communications device (either from via a PSTN or a wireless network operated by a mobile service provider). The TCG initiates a call from the gateway to a remote communication device over a VDN. By way of illustration and not as a limitation, a call is made from a first communication device to second communication device to which a TCG is connected. The call is then intercepted at the TCG where the call is converted via an appropriate protocol into a bit stream according to an appropriate protocol that is transferable over a VDN. In an embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet. The bit stream comprises proper identifiers and routing indications. The converted call is then sent over the voice and data network to another PSTN or TCG and finally to the end destination.

[0018] In another embodiment of the present invention, the functions of the TCG are performed by equipment operated by the operator of a PSTN. In this embodiment, the TCG is under the control of the operation of the PSTN and the caller directs the PSTN to route the call over a VDN.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] **Figure 1** illustrates a diagram of a standard phone call according to the prior art.

[0020] **Figure 2** illustrates a diagram of a cell phone call according to the prior art.

[0021] **Figure 3** illustrates a diagram of a POTS phone call routed through the Internet according to prior art.

[0022] **Figure 4** illustrates a diagram of a mobile phone call routed through the Internet according to one embodiment of present invention.

[0023] **Figure 5** illustrates another embodiment of a mobile phone call routed through the Internet according to the present invention.

[0024] **Figure 6** illustrates the logical flow of placing a telephone call from a mobile telephone using the present invention.

[0025] **Figure 7** illustrates a block diagram of a PSTN having means for sending a call

over a VDN at the direction of a caller in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0026] An embodiment of the present invention utilizes a telecommunications gateway (TCG) configured to receive communications from a remote location via a telephone call (either from the PSTN or a mobile service provider). The TCG initiates a call from the gateway to a remote communication device over a VDN. In another embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet and the remote communication device is a telephone (either wired or mobile), but the present invention is not so limited. The TCG functions as a bridge between the incoming calling device and the remote communication device. By way of illustration and not as a limitation, using the present invention the caller first places a call on a telephone (wired or mobile) to an end destination where their TCG is connected. The call is then intercepted at the TCG where the call is converted via an appropriate protocol into a bit stream according to an appropriate protocol that is transferable over a VDN. In an embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet. The bit stream comprises proper identifiers and routing indications. In another embodiment of the present invention, the bit stream comprises discrete packets. The converted call is then sent over the voice and data network to another PSTN or TCG and finally to the end destination.

[0027] In this application the term "mobile" is used to denote cellular telephone users, mobile telephone users and ultimately other users of mobile devices that might require access to long distance services in order to send or receive data. Thus while this application discusses the routing of mobile telephone calls, those skilled in the art will understand that this technology and method apply equally to other mobile devices as well. In addition, while the exemplary embodiments are described in the context of telephone devices (both wired and wireless), any communication device that is capable of providing the signaling and/or authentication information used by the various embodiments of the present invention may be employed without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0028] **Figure 3** illustrates a diagram of a phone call placed over the PSTN and routed through the Internet. By way of illustration and not as a limitation, a call is initiated on a telephone **300** to a number associated with a TCG **310**. This call is then routed normally to the TCG **310** through the PSTN **315**. The call is authenticated as being from an authorized user. If appropriate signaling is received from the caller, the TCG **310** converts the telephone signal into a bit stream according to an appropriate protocol that is transferable over a VDN **315**. In an embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet. The bit stream comprises proper identifiers and routing indications. In another embodiment of the present invention, the bit stream comprises discrete packets. The converted call is then sent to a final destination **320** via the VDN **315**. The path to the final destination may be via another PSTN **305** or another TCG **310**.

[0029] **Figure 4** illustrates a diagram of a mobile phone call routed through the Internet according to one embodiment present invention. A user places a call on a mobile phone **400** that is linked to a mobile phone network **405**. The call then is routed through the PSTN **410** to a telecommunications gateway (TCG) **415** that authenticates the caller and, if authenticated, converts the phone signal into a bit stream according to an appropriate protocol that is transferable over a VDN. In an embodiment of the present invention, the VDN is the Internet. The bit stream comprises proper identifiers and routing indications. In another embodiment of the present invention, the bit stream comprises discrete packets.

[0030] The converted call is then directed, over a VDN **420**, to another telecommunications device. As illustrated in **Figure 4**, the telecommunication device may be a telephone **425** connected to another TCG **415**, to a telephone **425** connected to a computer **430**, or a telephone connected to a TCG **415** that is connected to the VDN **420** via a computer **430**. However, the present invention is not so limited. The communication device to which the call is directed may be any device capable of receiving and processing the data sent by the caller.

[0031] In one embodiment of the present invention, the call made by the mobile phone is a phone number associated with the TCG. In another embodiment of the present

invention, the phone number is associated with a plurality of TCGs on and TCG network, and the mobile phone call is routed to a particular TCG on the network. In these embodiments, once the mobile phone has connected with the TCG, the mobile phone user is prompted for a dialing sequence, which corresponds with another TCG or to a PSTN telephone call.

[0032] As noted above, in an embodiment of the present invention, the TCG performs an authentication step wherein a user or an account associated with the calling telecommunication device is identified. Based upon this identification, the call is either allowed to proceed or not. In an embodiment of the present invention, the authentication of the caller is achieved using the caller ID data associated with the incoming call (either from a POTS or a mobile telephone or device). However, this is not meant as a limitation. Other authentication methods, such as electronic serial number (ESN), may be used to authenticate the user to the TCG. Similarly any other authentication system that uniquely identifies a user or group of users is within the scope of the present invention. For example, the caller may be prompted for more information such as a password or access code.

[0033] Though the Internet is used in the above example, the present invention contemplates the use of any voice and data network capable of transferring information as required by the present invention.

[0034] **Figure 5** illustrates another embodiment of the present invention where the call routing system discussed in reference to **Figure 3** is adapted to permit the call to be routed to a telephone **500** physically connected to TCG **310** rather than directed to VDN **315**. This transfer to a telephone physically connected to the TCG **310** rather than the VDN **315** may be initiated by a selection on telephone **300**, or a lack of a selection, either when the call is first made or once connection with the TCG **310** is established. The selection may take a variety of forms such as determining the presence of a long distance designator (for example, the # sign) in the telephone number associated with the TCG **310**, or not and waiting for an internal timer to note the absence of a "#" sign. However, such dialing notifications may include but not be limited to depressing of a

predetermined key, lack of selection of a predetermined key, or the calling of a unique telephone number. Although not illustrated, the call routing system discussed in reference to **Figure 4** may be similarly adapted to direct the call from the wireless telephone **400** to a telephone **425** physically connected to TCG **415**.

[0035] Referring now to **Figure 6**, the method of the present invention for placing calls over the Internet (for example) from a mobile telephone is illustrated. A mobile phone user first dials the number associated with a PSTN line connected to the TCG **600**. The TCG then detects the incoming call **605**. A determination is made whether the caller is authorized to access the VDN through the TCG **610**. If the caller does not present acceptable authorization credentials, **615** the call is directed to a telephone connected to the PSTN line.

[0036] If caller's authorization credentials are accepted, the TCG places the phone in the "off-hook" condition **620** and determines if a dialing signal is received **625**. If no dialing signal is received, the TCG passes the call through the telephone connected to the PSTN line **615**.

[0037] If a dialing signal is received, the TCG is ready for entry of a number or address to place a call over the VDN **630** according to the convention established by the TCG manufacturer and/or the VoIP service provider providing the VoIP service.

[0038] In an embodiment of the present invention, the authorization credentials comprise a caller ID. In another embodiment of the present invention, the caller is prompted to provide an authorization credential. In yet another embodiment of the present invention, in the event that the authorization credential is accepted, the TCG emits a uniquely identifiable tone to alert the caller to enter the dialing signal. In yet another embodiment of the present invention, the dialing signal comprises the "#" sign.

[0039] The caller follows the dialing signal with a telephone number or address as previously discussed. In an alternate embodiment, the TCG identifies what long distance call is desired by the initial dialing to the TCG. The TCG routes the call over a voice and data network, such as the Internet, to the desired long distance phone. Thus,

using the present invention, placing a call the TCG from long distance does not cost any more than a local call.

[0040] **Figure 7** illustrates a block diagram of a PSTN having means for sending a call over a VDN at the direction of a caller in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. A PSTN **715** comprises a switch **720** and a TCG **730**. The PSTN **715** receives mobile calls from mobile telephone **700** via mobile communication network **705**. The PSTN **715** also receives calls from telephone **710**. Calls received by the PSTN are processed by TCG **730** and their destination determined as previously discussed. Calls destined for communication device 1 **725** are passed to switch **720** and the calling party is connected to communication device 1 **725** via the PSTN **715**. Calls destined for communication device 2 **740** are passed to VDN **735** and ultimately to communication device 2 **740**.

[0041] By way of illustration and not as a limitation, telephone **710** places a call to another telephone on the PSTN **715**. (In this illustration, communication device 1 **725** is such a telephone.) The call is evaluated by TCG **730** and routed through switch **720** in a manner consistent with the prior art. Similarly, a call placed by mobile telephone **700** to communication device 1 **725** would be routed over the PSTN **715** and through switch **720**. By contrast, a caller may designate (using a that the call be transported via VDN **735** to communication device 2 **740**. Communication device 2 **740** may be any device or combination of devices that may be connected to, and receive communications from, VDN **735**, including a telephone. (See **Figure 4**.) In this embodiment of the present invention, TCG **730** determines whether a VDN designator is present in the dialed number and, if so, routes the call to the VDN for ultimate delivery to communication device 2 **740**.

[0042] The present invention uses a TCG in its various embodiments. The TCG itself may implement multiple digital networking protocols using a telephony protocol engine (TPE). One such protocol that may also be used is the Session Initiation Protocol, or SIP. SIP is an IETF signaling protocol for establishing real-time calls and conferences over Internet Protocol networks. In this embodiment, the TPE is implemented using

inexpensive, memory limited microprocessors and inexpensive flash memory. However, this is not meant as a limitation. As will be apparent to those skilled in the art, the present invention may be implemented in other computing contexts without departing from the scope of the present invention.